

STATE OF UTAH
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR



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Comments to the House and Senate Western Caucus
"The Unique Challenges of Economic Development in Public Land States"
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Good afternoon, I am happy to be here today to talk about two topics that are critical to my home state of Utah: Economic Development and Energy.

I am honored to govern a state that is blessed by an abundance of natural resources, while also being blessed with an amazing beauty and a natural wonder that we must preserve for future generations.

Make no mistake: These are not mutually exclusive blessings. Energy development and environmental protection can exist in harmony. Being good stewards of the Earth does allow for appropriate energy and natural resource development.

To do so, however, requires that we work together in a spirit of collaboration and from a starting point of mutual respect. As I have said many times before, it is high time that we lay down our arms, set aside the rhetoric and embrace our common goals instead of focusing on our differences. A willingness to find common ground is key.

Utah has long enjoyed a tradition of working with the BLM to achieve multiple use on public lands, and, as Governor, I plan to make sure that work continues. I appreciate the Department of Interior's assistance to help us maintain multiple use on the public land in Utah, and I thank them for our recently renewed partnership on this front.

As Governor, I am dedicated to building a strong personal and governmental relationship with the federal government, particularly Secretary Ken Salazar of the Department of Interior, Secretary Tom Vilsack of the Department of Agriculture and Secretary Steven Chu of the Department of Energy.

In fact, I met with Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Deputy Energy Secretary Dan Poneman earlier today to further these goals.

This is a follow-up meeting with Secretary Salazar since we last hosted him in Utah in April. The Secretary attended a meeting of my Balanced Resource Council, an innovative partnership-building effort that is bringing people together on all sides to address the many difficult land

issues we face in our state.

I also visited the Department of Energy today to provide Dr. Chu's staff copies of the 10-year strategic energy plan that I recently unveiled for the State of Utah. This energy plan focuses on developing Utah's traditional and renewable energy resources to the benefit of all Americans, while providing significant economic opportunities and jobs for the people of Utah.

Again, these efforts will not succeed without the federal government at the table as an honest broker – and I was heartened to hear Secretary Salazar say that we, in Utah, are setting a national standard that ought to be emulated throughout the nation.

I believe that Utah's approach is one that should be followed.

Of course, we are here today to talk about jobs. And in the heart of a national recession, job protection and job creation are the two most critical elements of economic recovery.

While I am pleased with the good working relationship Utah has forged with the Department of Interior, I must say that I am, at the same time, fearful that a new BLM review process on oil and gas permits will damage Utah's economic viability. The potential impact to already approved permits is troubling, and I will work to ensure that those existing permits are respected in Utah. This newly instituted policy is simply another level of government red tape that is both unnecessary and counter-productive.

The new level of regulation does nothing but create "analysis paralysis" on the United States' ability to address our national energy crisis. At a time that off-shore drilling has been stymied by the environmental disaster off the Gulf Coast, it is more important than ever that our federal government allows us to safely access on-shore reserves.

In fact, I believe, the BLM's Resource Management Plan process must be reviewed and revised, and it must be done with three goals in mind: Consistency, clarity and predictability.

The current system is inconsistent, it is unclear and it is unpredictable. It obstructs economic development in public-lands states like Utah, driving capital to states with more private land and foreclosing on important economic opportunities for our state and its citizens.

As these processes and policies are reviewed, it is vital that states – particularly Western states that have the most at stake – are involved in the process. Collaboration is the only way to ensure that we are making the best decisions for all parties.

In Utah, we are building relationships with organizations that have previously created roadblocks seemingly just for the sake of contention. Our new cooperative approach is beginning to show signs of success.

I'd like to offer two examples where the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance – an organization that has historically been at odds with the state – has worked with my Balanced Resource Council to achieve solid results.

First, SUWA and the Bill Barrett corporation, an exploration and production company – with the help of state leaders – recently reached an agreement that allows the company to drill in potential wilderness lands, as long as the company minimizes the number of drill sites and uses slant drills that cause less land disruption.

Second, SUWA has provisionally agreed to come to the table to help solve existing RS2477 road claims with a new method that will be tried in Iron County, Utah. These road claims have been a bone of contention and have choked our legal system for far too long. By working together, we have found a way to find some resolution on this issue.

But there is still work to be done, both in working with stakeholders in Utah and here in Washington D.C.

I was disappointed to hear just a few days ago that the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance recently filed an amendment to a previous lawsuit on three of our most important BLM Resource Management Plans. We are concerned that this action could potentially shut down previously approved oil and gas drilling permits and could threaten Utah jobs.

Utah will oppose this effort, and we will work proactively with environmental groups and others to resolve this issue. We are interested in finding solutions through discussion and negotiation, leaving the courts as a last resort.

I am proud of the work we've done in Utah, and I believe the Congress would be well-served to look to Utah as a model to further economic development, energy independence and environmental protection throughout the nation.

It can happen. And, in Utah, we're creating the roadmap as to how it can be done.

Thank you.